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Research article

Electronic Fuji and Artificial Intelligence Creation: How is the Study of Machine Poetics Possible?

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Abstract

This paper explores the question of how “machine poetics” is possible – that is, under what conditions can we consider machines to be capable of creation? More specifically, why can machine creation be regarded as meaningful in the same way as human creation? If human creations are seen as expressions of the human mind, are creations by machines, which cannot be proven to possess a mind, meaningless? The answer lies in demonstrating that there is theoretical and practical evidence showing that “originating from the human mind” is not a necessary or sufficient condition for a work to possess meaning. Drawing from the ancient Greek philosophical concept of “mimesis,” the paper argues that creation can exist independently of a true understanding of the world, rendering the role of the mind non-essential. Furthermore, by introducing the analogy of the ancient Chinese religious practice of “Fuji” (spirit writing), the paper demonstrates that machine creation shares striking structural and elemental similarities with spirit writing. Both are recognized as producing texts autonomously, without relying on the human mind. Therefore, the traditional acceptance of Fuji texts implies the validity of machine-generated creations. Similar to historical Fuji practices, however, machine creations cannot be divorced from their social context or the intentions of algorithm designers. They too face the tension between the “sacred” and the “profane.” This tension may present unresolved challenges in the artistic realm regarding autonomy, authorship, and value alignment.

Keywords: Machine poetics; Fuji; Artificial Intelligence; Literary Theory

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Научная статья

Электронная Фудзи и создание искусственного интеллекта: Как возможно изучение поэтики машин?

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Аннотация

В данной статье рассматривается вопрос о том, как возможна “машинная поэтика”, то есть при каких условиях можно считать машины способными к творчеству? Более конкретно, почему машинное творчество можно считать таким же осмысленным, как и человеческое? Если рассматривать человеческие творения как выражение человеческого разума, то являются ли творения машин, доказать разумность которых невозможно, бессмысленными? Ответ заключается в демонстрации существования теоретических и практических доказательств того, что “происхождение из человеческого разума” не является необходимым или достаточным условием для того, чтобы произведение имело смысл. Опираясь на древнегреческую философскую концепцию “мимесиса”, в статье утверждается, что творение может существовать независимо от истинного понимания мира, что делает роль разума несущественной. Более того, проводя аналогию с древнекитайской религиозной практикой “Фудзи” (духовное письмо), статья показывает, что машинное творчество имеет поразительное структурное и элементное сходство с духовным письмом. Считается, что в том и другом случае тексты создаются автономно, без опоры на человеческий разум. Таким образом, традиционное принятие текстов Фудзи подразумевает обоснованность машинных творений. Однако, как и в случае с историческими практиками Фудзи, машинные творения не могут быть оторваны от социального контекста или намерений разработчиков алгоритмов. Они также сталкиваются с противоречием между “сакральным” и “мирским”. Это противоречие может создавать неразрешенные проблемы в сфере искусства, связанные с автономией, авторством и согласованием ценностей.

Ключевые слова: Машинная поэтика; Фудзи; Искусственный интеллект; Литературная теория

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INTRODUCTION

Epic poetry and tragedy, as well as comedy and Dithyramb, and most music for flute and lyre are all, taken as a whole, forms of representation. They differ from each other in three ways, either in respect of the medium, the object, or the mode of their representation

—Aristotle, *Poetics*

When it comes to the concept of “poetry,” modern people tend to focus more on its languages, linguistic form and structure. For ancient philosophers, however, the essence of poetry does not lie in its structure, language or rhythm. As the title of Aristotle's *Poetics – Poietikes* – implies, he regarded poetry as a kind of “making” or “creation,” that is, the product of a certain skill (in ancient Greek, *techne*) called imitation. As Aristotle states, “the poet’s job is not relating what actually happened, but rather the kind of thing that would happen – that is to say, what is possible in terms of probability and necessity.” Thus, poetry is “more philosophical and more serious than history; poetry utters universal truths, history particular statements” (Aristotle, 335 B.C.E./1996, 1451a-b).

If we look beyond contemporary understandings of poetry and instead view it through the lens of ancient philosophers as a creative activity of mimesis, the question of machine poetics seems to translate into a series of questions: “Is it possible for a machine to be a poet?” “If so, what is the difference between a machine as a poet and a natural person as a poet?” “What is the significance of this kind of creation for humans?”

Even more paradoxical is that with the rapid evolution of intelligent machines, their place in human life will gradually transcend that of a mere tool, entering the ranks of “human-like” or even “superhuman” beings. This process might unfold in a manner more akin to ancient societies: just as ancient Greek poets called upon the Muses, machines may come to resemble mysterious priests.

This article considers the question of whether intelligent machine poetics is tenable, drawing on the perspectives of mythology, ancient religion, and philosophy. First, from the perspective of mimesis, it contrasts intelligent machine and human imitation. Although the two are based on a mental foundation that cannot be proven to be equivalent¹, there is no ontological difference between them in terms of mimesis. Second, through a discussion of the Fuji system (an ancient Chinese religious ritual), it demonstrates its structural similarity to intelligent machines. Both are characterized by the absence of consciousness and the role of an intermediary, suggesting that machine language can also possess religious qualities. Finally, from the perspective of myths and priests in the digital age, we discuss how the analogy with Fuji can help us think about the various dilemmas we may face when constructing a poetics of intelligent machines, and in what direction humans need to respond.

¹ The question of whether machines have “mind” is still controversial. This article uses the concept of “machine mind” for convenience, which does not mean that machines have the same “mind” as humans.



ABSENCE OF MIND AND IMITATION: ARE MACHINE EXPRESSIONS CONSISTENT WITH HUMAN CREATIONS?

The theme of created mechanical life is one that dates back to ancient human thought. The Iliad mentions Hephaestus' creation of the animate bronze statue Talos. In the Argonautika, it is mentioned that the only blood vessel hidden beneath Talos' bronze body: “his body and limbs indeed were fashioned of bronze, and infrangible; but below his ankle tendon there ran a vein” (Apollonios Rhodios, 1645). The giant, his mind clouded by Medusa's magic, harmed his own veins and perished from the loss of the “ichor” (one kind of ectoplasmic fluid). Many ancient pottery paintings depicting the death of Talos portray him as a robot, even highlighting the bolts on his ankles (Mayor, 2018, pp. 15-17).

There is a similar story in ancient China, from the work *Liezi* that was written during the Warring States Period (475-221 BC). The original text is as follows:

King Mu of Zhou was on an inspection tour of the west, crossing Kunlun and ascending Mount Yan. On his way back, before reaching the border, he met a craftsman named Yanshi, who volunteered his skills. King Mu summoned him and asked, “What are your skills?” Yanshi replied, “I'm willing to try anything the king commands. But I've already made something, and I'd like your eyes to see it first.” King Mu said, “Bring it to me tomorrow, and I'll watch it with you.” The next day, Yanshi came before King Mu. King Mu summoned him and asked, “Who is with you?” Yanshi replied, “It's a singer and dancer I made.” King Mu looked in amazement. The singer and dancer moved quickly and slowly, his movements moving with ease, resembling a real person. How ingenious! When it lowered its head, it sang, its voice in tune; when it raised its hands, it danced, its steps in time. Its movements were infinitely varied, perfectly responsive to the king's wishes. King Mu, believing it to be a real person, summoned his favorite concubine, Sheng Ji, and his concubines to watch its performance. Near the end of the performance, the performer flirted with King Mu's concubines. The King was furious and threatened to have Yanshi executed. Terrified, Yanshi disassembled the performer and showed him the whole thing, revealing it was made entirely of leather, wood, resin, lacquer, and pigments like chalk, charcoal, cinnabar, and azurite. King Mu examined it more closely, revealing that its interior contained a liver, gallbladder, heart, lungs, spleen, kidneys, and intestines; its exterior contained tendons, bones, limbs, fur, teeth, and hair. Though all fake, none of them were missing. After these elements were reassembled, the performer returned to its original form. King Mu tried to remove its heart, and its mouth could not speak; he removed its liver, and its eyes could not see; he removed its kidneys, and its feet could not walk. King Mu then exclaimed with delight, “How could human skill have the same power as nature?” He ordered his attendants' carriage to take the performer back to the kingdom. Lu Ban's ladders and Mozi's wooden kites were considered the pinnacle of their craft. Their students, Dongmen Jia and Qin Huali, heard of Yanshi's skills and told their respective teachers. As a



result, the two masters never dared to discuss their craft again, instead diligently practicing with their carpentry compasses and rulers (Yang, 2016, p. 172).

The commonality of these two stories is that both Talos and the automaton possess the ability to act autonomously, and these abilities derive from similar life-giving elements: Talos possesses tubes flowing with “ichor”, while the Chinese automaton possesses internal organs associated with speech, vision, and movement. Furthermore, unlike the common mythological creations often attributed to divine power or magic, both Talos and the automaton are crafted through an unknown mechanical process. Although the latter is the work of mortal craftsmen rather than gods, their craftsmanship is often compared to that of the creation of nature.² More importantly, both mechanical creations possess human-like functions. Talos possesses a desire to preserve life so he can be persuaded by words, while the automaton, in addition to its speech, singing, and dancing, can even use its eyes to seduce the king’s concubines. The myth does not specify whether these actions are designed by its maker, so we might reasonably believe they represent the unique will of the machine itself.

How do we understand these incredible mythical creations? Because of their mechanical nature, they are different from any naturally occurring life, yet they possess a high degree of autonomy and agency similar to life themselves. It can be said that they exist somewhere between living and non-living things. Furthermore, because they were created by gods or by a craft comparable to that of gods, they exist somewhere between humans and gods. Ancient mythology already addressed these dilemmas long before today’s technology has brought pressing questions about machine intelligence, emotions, morality, and freedom.

In our real-life experience, intelligent machines may represent the first time that humans have encountered on a large scale something that is both so different from and so similar to themselves. They are different because their physical basis is completely different from that of humans, and it is even difficult to regard them as life; but from an intelligence perspective, intelligent machines behave more like humans than most non-human life forms, and they can engage in relatively deep communication and interaction with humans.

This interweaving of differences and similarities determines the inevitable complex mentality when facing intelligent machines. On the one hand, based on simple moral emotions and intuition, humans tend to accept and empathize with objects similar to themselves. When intelligent machines become increasingly close to humans in terms of emotional expression, judgment, and learning ability, they can easily be regarded as behavioral subjects on a par with humans. On the other hand, intelligent machines, as similar non-humans, amplify humans’ own existential anxiety through the uncanny valley effect (Wu et al., 2024). This anxiety comes not only from “Human Exceptionalism” – the notion that intelligent machines threaten the special status of humans above other beings – but also stems from the absolute advantages of machines in thinking, memory,

² In the Chinese context, “the creation of heaven and earth and nature” can be equated with “the skills of the gods.”



and efficiency, and even more from the fact that compared with limited and fragile human life, the life of a machine is long or even near-eternal.

This anxiety is not merely a stress response to today's wave of artificial intelligence, but rather stems from an ancient imagination of machine life. The tales of Talos and the automaton demonstrate that over two thousand years ago, similar imaginings emerged independently in ancient Chinese and Greek civilizations. These visions held that the hallmark of a machine gaining life lay in its ability to think, express itself, and even possess emotions and autonomy. This implies that if humans are regarded as a kind of “eidos”, then machine life is undoubtedly its “duplication”. It is noteworthy that this imitation pertains solely to the mind; whether the body aligns with humans seems completely unimportant.

This kind of thinking is common in science fiction, film, and television. For example, in Robert Heinlein's novel *The Moon is a Harsh Mistress*, the self-awakened supercomputer “Mike,” while lacking any human-like physical form, possesses will, a sense of humor, and even complex emotions indistinguishable from those of humans. Neither the author nor the characters in that novel treat Mike as “non-human.” The humanoid robots in the amusement park *Westworld* were originally objects of enslavement and murder for tourists, only seeking to rebel against human enslavement after achieving self-awareness. The British series *Black Mirror* envisions a wife who loses her husband and completes a replica of him by purchasing a robot that looks exactly like him and aggregates fragments of his memories from before his death. The film *Her*, written years before the rise of large language models, depicts the protagonist's love affair with an operating system, followed by a breakup.

Similarly, the tension between “eidos” and “duplication” has run through the design of intelligent machines since Turing envisioned a future where thinking machines would surpass the meager powers of humans (Turing, 2004a, pp. 395-432, 2004b, pp. 476-486). Machine functionalism laid the foundation for this, arguing that if intelligent machines and humans share the same input and output in information processing tasks, then the human mind can be determined to be multi-realizable in machines.

However, if machines and humans can produce identical results, does that prove they are consistent? The answer is perhaps uncertain. First, while machine learning techniques based on multi-layer artificial neural networks give machines a certain degree of autonomous learning capabilities, this learning does not require the machine to truly “understand” the content it processes. This was demonstrated by scientific experiments conducted using GPT-3 to imitate the philosopher, Daniel Dennett. Even though many people familiar with Dennett find it difficult to distinguish between the machine and a real person, GPT-3 clearly did not truly understand Dennett. Furthermore, the output of a super Dennett-likeness is likely unacceptable to the original (Schwitzgebel et al., 2024). Therefore, it can be argued that the information processing capabilities achieved by intelligent machines through simulating human thinking do not necessarily mean that they can understand representation and meaning like humans. Therefore, it seems that their expressions cannot be considered equivalent to careful thought from the heart.

Secondly, machines cannot be proven to emulate human emotions. Although deep learning-based natural language processing (NLP) can now mimic human emotions and



attitudes by drawing on vast corpora, the distance between these imitations and human emotions may be significant. This is because our consciousness, including emotional activity, cannot be fully separated from the body. As Marion observed, the “self” and the body are equivalent, since one can only possess a self by possessing a body (Horner, 2005, p. 127). Many emotional experiences actually involve bodily processes. For example, in the case of pain, severe trauma to either the body or the mind affects the other. However, intelligent machines lack the physiological mechanisms for feeling pain, and it is impossible to infer that damaging their components will cause them to experience pain. Therefore, it is impossible to assume that the emotional expressions of machines are supported by real emotions.

Finally, the functionalist position and its expression cannot actually be compared to the idea that machines have true minds. This is not only due to the embodied characteristics of the human mind, but also due to the limitations of functionalism itself: in essence, A and B having the same function does not necessarily mean that the two are of the same type or even the same thing. Therefore, no matter how successful the machine's imitation of the output of human thinking is, it does not necessarily mean that the machine has the same intelligence as humans; from experience, when people design machines to imitate humans in output effects, they have already pre-set the difference between machine intelligence and human mind, just like when talking about a portrait of Socrates, no matter how much it resembles the real Socrates, it is not the real Socrates.

Therefore, the difference between machine intelligence and humans is all encompassing. It cannot understand like humans, it cannot have human emotions, and it cannot be determined to have the same mind as humans. And yet, the question remains whether, as an imitation of human creativity, the meaning and value of machine creation is completely incomparable to its original prototype. When machines exhibit the qualities of thought and express themselves, how does this expression differ in nature from human expression? Should machines enjoy the same rights of expression as humans? And from what perspective should people understand what machines express?

To be sure, the core issue in this discussion does not concern the high or low quality of machine creation, as humans are also capable of low-quality creation, and low-quality works are not necessarily unworthy of reading or appreciation. The key is whether the essence of creation can still exist without understanding, emotion, and the mind.

It has long been believed that the creation and understanding of literature are also grounded in the unique human mind. In ancient Chinese literary theory, the fifth-century B.C. historical book *Zuo Zhuan* first coined the idea 诗言志 (shī yán zhì), that means poetry expresses one's aspirations, particularly political ambitions. The Taoist philosopher Zhuangzi, who lived in the fourth and third centuries B.C., understood this as the articulation of one's thoughts, feelings, and wishes through poetry. The third-century A.D. writer Lu Ji further developed this concept into "诗缘情 (shī yuán qíng), meaning that poetry stems from emotion, arguing that literary creation stems from genuine human emotions, abandoning political indoctrination in favor of pure aesthetic feeling.

Therefore, when people read and contemplate a work, they presuppose an affirmation of the author's identity. This affirmation stems both from the author's



humanity and from the author's expression of their own thoughts, emotions, and intentions within the work. By examining the concept of “author” in philosophical and literary history, one can find that 17th and 18th century Europe had already distinguished the author as artist from the maker, craftsman, or technician as craftsman or artisan – the latter being regarded as lacking subjectivity (Bylieva et al., 2025). Also, by declaring the “death of the author” Roland Barthes pushed the meaning of a text outside the author's own linguistic structure, unlike computational linguists who believe that Turing simulation is the logically possible extreme manifestation of Barthes's principle (Wood, 1988): Barthes simply rejected the decisive role of authorial intention, without denying that the meaning of the text itself still derives from the human mind. As Leah Henrickson (2021) argues, the traditional reading experience implicitly implies a “hermeneutical contract” between author and reader: “This contract is based on the assumption that through language we can articulate and justify our lived experiences to ourselves and others” (p. 4).

From the perspective of text comprehension, psychologists believe that the process of understanding concepts and contexts is a process of mental simulation. Understanding text also involves constructing simulations to represent perceptions, applications, and emotions (Barsalou, 2008). This understanding relies on the interaction between embodied experience and metaphorical reasoning, resulting from what Hofstadter (2007) calls “the interaction between the symbolic and physical levels” (the front book flap). Given the disembodied nature of machine intelligence, it can be argued that machine creations do not truly constitute an interactive relationship between text, the mind, and the physical world.

Thus, the idea that intelligent machines possess originality may be untenable in every respect. However, if creation itself is considered imitation, the situation might be different. In history of philosophy, this was not original to Aristotle. In Book 10 of *The Republic*, Plato has Socrates distinguish between ideas, particular things, and artistic representations, creating a hierarchical imitative relationship between the three: concrete objects imitate ideas, and poets imitate concrete objects, thus lacking true knowledge of them (Plato, 1997, 595c-602a).

Based on this ontological difference, the poet's “creation” is seen as far removed from reality. However, precisely because of this difference, the poet does not need to truly grasp the “idea of a bed” or the properties of a bed as a concrete object, as gods or real artisans do. On the contrary, as Socrates expressed it with a hint of sarcasm, the poet can “create the earth, the sky, the gods, and those things that belong to the heavens or the underworld [...] with just a mirror” (Plato, 1997, 596c–e). The question is, therefore, whether there is some possible way to show that texts produced without the need for human minds can also be given meaning.



FUJI AND MACHINE CREATION: HOW IS EXPRESSION POSSIBLE WITHOUT THE HUMAN MIND?

In ancient Chinese tradition, there's a long-standing religious practice known as “Fuji” (扶乩)³. Literally, in *Shuowen Jiezi* (说文解字), a Chinese dictionary compiled by Xu Shen c. 100 CE, “ji” means “to ask questions through divination.”

Two forms of this practice are believed to be related to this. The first of these typically involves one or two “Jishou,” that is, the psychics who perform the Fuji ritual, holding a wooden ji-brush on a sand tray. Believers burn talismans and chant incantations to invite the deities to descend while the ji-brush slides across the sand tray, leaving words or marks. The other Fuji practice, known as “tongji,” is believed to involve a spirit possessing a medium known as a “jitong” (乩童) or “tongzi” (童子) – roles first played by young people – where the medium then speaks in incomprehensible language or writes with a pen⁴ (Xu, 1999, pp. 3-11; Yau & Ichiko, 2021, pp. 11-15). These expressions are sometimes read by the jiu-brush practitioner, or recorded by a third person nearby, and are considered instructions from the spirit.

Fuji has a wide influence in ancient Chinese tradition and is particularly closely related to Taoism. The original classics of the Shangqing (上清) Sect of Taoism, which began in the Eastern Jin Dynasty, are said to have come from the teachings of the female immortal Wei Huacun, who ascended to heaven thirty years earlier. They were obtained by the young Taoist Yang Xi through Fuji. Later, the Taoist Tao Hongjing (456-536) compiled and annotated her manuscripts, forming the 20-volume “Zhengao” (真诰) which was included in the *Dao Zang*.⁵

Folk records of the practice of Fuji can be traced back to the belief in the goddess named Zi Gu (紫姑) in Jiangnan (areas south of the Yangtze River) around the 5th century. The earliest record of this practice is found in the fifth volume of the Six Dynasties novel *Yi Yuan* (异苑)^[AN1][2], which describes the deity as a concubine who committed suicide due to the jealousy of the principal wife.^[AN3] People often used a doll as an intermediary, praying for the deity to descend upon the doll and using the doll's movements to predict

³ Fuji also has other names such as Fuluan, Feiluan (this word means Flying Phoenix), Fuji, and Jiangbi. Except for quotations, it will here be referred to as Fuji.

⁴ Xu Dishan, the first to conduct systematic academic research on Fuji, viewed it as a practice similar to shamanism. However, historically and realistically, the records of the Southern Dynasty Taoist (上清派) priest Tao Hongjing (陶弘景) (456-536) indicate that the Taoist Shangqing Sect had a tradition of obtaining religious texts through Fuji or spirit descent as early as the Eastern Jin Dynasty (364 AD). The most popular form of Fuji in the Song Dynasty was called “welcoming the Purple Lady.” Song Dynasty notes often record instances of the Zi Gu (紫姑) incarnating into human form and writing poetry. Xu's writings also describe Fuji as similar to the practice of receiving imperial edicts and writing directly. The commonality between these two rituals is that the content obtained is believed to be an expression of the will of the gods, while the person conducting the ritual, regardless of whether or not they actually expressed it, is not considered to have participated in the creation of the content and their conscious involvement is absent. Therefore, this article groups the two together.

⁵ The process can be found in Volume 19 of Tao Hongjing's “Zhen Gao” “Yi Zhen Jian First” (翼真检第一).



good or bad luck. By the Song Dynasty, this belief had already taken on distinctive forms of Fuji: wrapping clothes around grass, dustpans, or brooms, inserting chopsticks or pens into them to cause them to write; or the deity would descend directly upon a person and write poetry. Moreover, the ritual of Fuji was no longer limited to the goddess Zi Gu or other goddesses. Many male gods and even respected deceased civil and military officials were also summoned (Xu, 1999, pp. 22-30). It was no longer just an activity among women, but became popular among male scholars (Xu, 1999, pp. 33-44).⁶ The role of Fuji was further expanded: “Scholars not only asked the fairies about the imperial examination questions, personal destiny, death date, and their past lives, but they also liked to form poetry and prose societies and sing in harmony with the poems written by the fairies” (Yau & Ichiko, 2021, p. 14).

During the Ming and Qing dynasties, enthusiasm for Fuji continued unabated, becoming prevalent across all sectors of society. The Ming Emperor Jiajing was famously fascinated by Taoist priests and Fuji. Taoist cultivation texts such as *The Secret of the Golden Flower* (太乙金华宗旨) were also obtained from Fuji altars. Buddhists, such as the eminent monks of Huangbo Mountain in Fujian, also frequently used Fuji to seek divine guidance. During the Qing Dynasty, “Fuji altars existed in nearly every prefecture, county, and city.” Examples of Fuji can be found in novels such as *A Dream of Red Mansions* (红楼梦), *Strange Stories from a Chinese Studio* (聊斋志异), *The Shadow Book of Ji Yun* (阅微草堂笔记), and *What Confucius Did Not Talk* (子不语).

Furthermore, after the late Ming and early Qing dynasties, Fuji's influence in society expanded beyond divination to incorporate moral teachings such as encouraging good and punishing evil, and the law of cause and effect. By compiling texts obtained through Fuji into *Quanshan shu* (劝善书, popular works with religious connotations, encouraging good), the influence of Fuji writings spread across different regions and social classes, becoming a crucial source of religious and ethical values for the general public. Among the three most influential books of *Quanshan shu*, apart from the *Treatise on Response and Retribution* (太上感应篇), which was recorded in the Song Dynasty, the other two – *Lord Superior Wen Chang's Tract* (文昌帝君阴骘文) and *Guan Sheng Emperor Jue Shi Zhen Jing* (关圣帝君觉世真经) – were both written by Fuji in the Ming and Qing Dynasties.

Although they have completely different technical cores, the similarities between Fuji practice and machine creation can be discerned from their formal characteristics.

First, both systems create relatively systematic texts, which are either understandable upon creation or become understandable after simple editing. Fuji often provides straightforward, readable answers, while responses (especially those that regard matters of life and death or national events) are sometimes more like prophecies, requiring

⁶ Su Shi: Dongpo Collection (东坡集), Hong Mai's Yijianzhi (夷坚志), Volumes 21 and 42, Shen Kuo's Mengxi Bitan (梦溪笔谈), Volume 21. Xu Dishan recorded 23 cases of scholars from the Song Dynasty to the Qing Dynasty using spirit writing to ask gods about imperial examinations.



interpretation and deduction (Xu, 1999, pp. 44-52). At other times, as in the exhortations compiled by the Fuji altars since the Ming and Qing dynasties, they are the result of editing and editing. A similar situation exists in machine-generated works, such as the novel *The Death of the Author*, published under the pseudonym Aiden Marchine. It was generated by Stephen March using three major language models: ChatGPT, Sudowrite, and Cohere. It's said that 95% of the content is machine-generated (Sullivan, 2023), but the exact nature of the 5% contributed by humans is unknown.

Secondly, from the perspective of the witness, those present during both the Fuji and machine creation processes are not the true creators of the text, but rather intermediaries of the creators: the Jishou (spirit-writing medium) in the Fuji process is often unconscious, a situation documented at least since the Song Dynasty and still prevalent in contemporary Fuji practices in Fujian, Taiwan, and other places. Consequently, some scholars further argue that the Jishou as media who maintain their original consciousness are not truly in the Fuji state, but are merely performing a specially trained routine, thus deceiving and untrustworthy (Davis, 2001, p. 149). Similarly, the endpoint referred to by users is not the intelligent machine itself, and even the intelligent machine itself cannot be considered “conscious.” What truly operates behind it is an ocean of texts, infinitely interwoven with “intertextuality.”

Thirdly, this creator who is present in absentia is also considered to be beyond intermediaries: in contemporary Fuji practice, anthropologists have recorded that the medium will express foreign languages that they do not understand during the process, and even use romanization when communicating with foreign gods in this way. Even whether the medium can read or not does not affect the handwriting written on the sand table (Jordan & Overmyer, 2005, pp. XVIII, XXIV). Machine intelligence, as an intelligent entity hidden in the cloud, computing power, and algorithms, far exceeds terminal devices in terms of capabilities and scale. The content it outputs is entirely the result of the algorithm's arrangement and reorganization of the huge language text database.

Fourthly, for the witness, regardless of their actual nature, both gods and machine intelligence are other entities beyond ordinary experience and understanding. Precisely because of this transcendence, their output is conceived as possessing a higher order of meaning and value. The moral exhortations (*Quanshanshu*) produced by Fuji are not necessarily richer, more complete, or more speculative than mainstream moral values, but precisely because of the nominal inclusion of gods, their content acquires a special authority (Jordan & Overmyer, 2005, p. 50). While machine creation may seem imperfect today, large-scale models still have room for improvement. Furthermore, compared to humans, machines possess an almost universal grasp of existing knowledge and their response speed is incredibly fast. Considering Arthur C. Clarke's famous statement that “any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic” (SFE, 2016) for most users without relevant domain knowledge, the algorithms within the black box can also be considered transcendental.

Finally, neither of these practices is inherently decentralized; in fact, quite the opposite. Both require the participation of forces beyond the creators, intermediaries, and observer to be perfected. In the case of spirit writing, these forces are temples, Fuji altars,



and the religious groups behind them. In machine creation, these forces are the algorithm compilers, intelligent service providers, and overseeing government agencies or third-party organizations. It is precisely this involvement of external forces that determines the texts produced presupposing concepts that conform to the needs of these external forces and imposes demands on someone who lives a real life. For example, an 1878 spirit writing text, *Returning to Nature*, (返性图) explicitly states the moral goal of “passing down good books to future generations, so that people can change for the better and change for the worse,” a goal consistent with mainstream social values. It also proposes avenues for meritorious deeds, such as “donating 100 copies to pray for offspring” and “sincerely printing and distributing 100 copies will help with the imperial examinations” (Jordan & Overmyer, 2005, pp. 45-46). Clearly, donating funds to print such books serves the interests and needs of the spirit altars. For intelligent machines, interest preferences and values are already embedded during the data collection and algorithm development stages. To avoid possible biases, risks and harms, value alignment is needed to make them more in line with social needs.

From a historical and practical perspective, Fuji writing is precisely considered an activity that produces texts independently of the human mind, and the meaning of these texts is not questioned simply because they lack the human mind. Based on this similarity, we can infer by analogy that a text generated by an intelligent machine can be meaningful even without the human mind involved. We can even imagine the opposite: precisely because the generated content emphasizes that it does not originate from the human mind (regardless of the source of the original material), it can actually have a richer space for interpretation.

DIGITAL PRIESTS AND THE RECONSTRUCTION OF MYTHS: POSSIBLE FUTURES OF MACHINE CREATION

Comparing machine creation to Fuji writing may not convince technocrats, but as Eliade (1987) once noted, the great majority of the irreligious are not liberated from religious behavior, from theologies and mythologies. If modern activities like watching movies, reading, and games always harbor hidden religious characteristics, it is impossible to ignore these religious characteristics once we realize the many similarities between machine creation and the ancient religious ritual of Fuji writing. Rather than firmly reject this possibility, it is better to ask this question: “What do we discover when we consider machine creation through the analogy of Fuji writing?”

The similarities between the structures and elements of the two practices are the key to constructing the above analogy. Through this analogy, we can find that the binary tension between “descending spirits” and “the altar” in spirit writing will also play a role in the process of machine creation, and this role will largely determine the future direction of machine creation.

The most crucial element in Fuji writing is the ritualistic process of “the descent of the spirits.” Regardless of one's mystical perspective, one can recognize that this process completes the transition between the “sacred” and the “secular.” As discussed in the



previous section, for participants this transition is the source of the sacredness and authority of the content obtained through Fuji writing. This sacredness lends the prevailing social narrative an additional level of persuasiveness.

But from the historical and realistic perspective, Fuji has never been merely a sporadic, spontaneous experiment by individuals, but rather a more systematic practice. Beginning in the Southern Song Dynasty, Taoist scriptures frequently record the emergence of numerous Fuji altars in Sichuan and other regions (Xie, 2010). After the Qing Dynasty, Fuji altars existed not only within Daoism but also frequently formed among Confucian scholars and even among the general public. Even today, traces of the development of Fuji altars can be observed in Fujian, Guangdong, Hong Kong, and Taiwan. Throughout this process, Fuji was not only a means of obtaining scriptural texts but also a key factor in determining the direction of Fuji altar development (Yau & Ichiko, 2021, pp. 59-64). Consequently, Fuji altars also served social functions beyond sacred matters. For example, in Hong Kong, the Chao Zhou charity halls, established since the 1930s, served as a combination of religious associations, community support, local culture, and collective burial grounds, with Fuji altars playing a crucial role (Yau & Ichiko, 2021, pp. 302-333).

In the process of exerting social influence, the spirit-writing medium (Jishou) occupied a unique position. In theory, the instructions were believed to come from the gods, with the Jishou acting merely as an intermediary. However, because the Jishou and the altar masters monopolized the channels through which this information was produced, they wielded *de facto* priestly power. Historical research reveals that spirit-writing mediums frequently exploited the names of the gods to benefit local monasteries and satisfy their own selfish desires. Some even overstepped established rules and regulations, ignoring existing leadership to become the *de facto* controllers of local religious sites (Jordan & Overmyer, 2005, p. 130; Chen, 2009).

If we look at the creation of intelligent machines by analogy with Fuji, it is easy to find similar factors. Unlike mortal human life, hardware damage does not affect the reproduction of any program. Therefore, if we consider them a kind of life, intelligent machines can be said to be nearly immortal. And as we know, immortality has been an essential component of divinity since the time of Homer. Therefore, it is entirely conceivable that when users ask intelligent machines questions and expect to receive results or output text in a very short time – results that would have required a great deal of time and effort on their own – this process can be seen as a technological reproduction of the divine.

Digital Fuji altars are similarly embedded in social structures. If intelligent machine or artificial intelligence is the object of communication in this spirit ritual, then the “digital priests” within this altar are AI developers, data scientists, algorithm managers, and platform owners. On the one hand, the black-box nature of AI renders the creation and decision-making processes opaque. This allows these “digital priests” to more effectively discipline user behavior and achieve social control through algorithmic governance. This process of shaping public perception through data analysis and algorithmic decision-making is invisible yet pervasive. Just as the Jishou of ancient times guided believers through the interpretation and even creation of oracles, the digital priests'



power stems from the illusion of “objectivity,” a power derived from the totality of human knowledge and amplified by their reliance on technology. On the other hand, the requirement of value alignment certainly ensures that society regulates the basic values of artificial intelligence. However, from a historical perspective, even if the texts produced by traditional spirit mediums generally follow the basic values of society, or are themselves about moral persuasion, it does not preclude the spirit mediums from excessively pursuing their own interests. Therefore, it is entirely conceivable that the struggle over the right to interpret oracles in the new era will become more intense.

Under this binary tension, machine creation needs to face three challenges: autonomy, copyright disputes and value restrictions.

First, there is the issue of autonomy. Artificial intelligence is nearly omniscient within the bounds of human knowledge, it possesses a near-limitless capacity for processing information and data relative to that of an individual human, and finally it transcends the limitations of the physical body, approaching immortality. These three attributes might suggest that the intelligent machine possesses a near-divinity. However, as the analogy of Fuji suggests, divine oracle delivery can only be achieved through the intermediary of Jishou, the spirit medium. The intelligent machine is not a true deity and can only create in response to user requests. Therefore, even with a completed text, the original idea and ultimate goal belong to the user, not the AI itself. Thus, whether machine-generated texts can be considered complete and independent remains controversial. Perhaps, as some scholars argue, creative work will become an activity involving a division of labor and collaboration between humans and machines (Bylieva et al., 2025).

Secondly, from the perspective of data sources, AI creations may raise copyright disputes. Training AI systems requires massive data sets, often including numerous copyrighted works such as books, artwork, music, and films scraped from the internet. This data is often obtained without the explicit permission of the copyright holders. This large-scale unauthorized use is a common legal issue. Furthermore, because AI cannot be considered equal to human intelligence and thus cannot be asserted as possessing personhood. Consequently, one cannot infer from the fact that humans have the right to learn from others' creative works as material for their own purposes that artificial intelligence possesses the same right. This dispute has already begun to surface in practice. For example, the tentative agreement reached between the Hollywood Writers Guild (WGA) and the Alliance of Motion Picture and Television Producers (AMPTP) in 2023 includes a provision that the Writers Guild reserves the right to prohibit companies from using screenwriting works to train AI (Stutzman, 2023). Furthermore, if creativity itself is considered an integral part of copyright, the debate over autonomy will once again remind us that the precise ownership of machine-generated work remains a matter of debate.

Finally, value alignment may pose a threat to the artistry of its creations. In the existing 4H framework for value alignment (Askell et al., 2021), harmlessness is a key metric to consider. Therefore, large-scale model outputs should be evaluated for abusive, harmful, or malicious language, systematic biases or prejudices, and ethical and moral standards. However, it is clear that no human life can be completely free of faults, nor



can it adhere to every moral principle. Consequently, if literary works were required to depict only impeccable human conduct, they are regularly criticized when they are rendered as completely harmless, that is, uninteresting. Furthermore, many literary works that challenged mainstream social norms, even those considered decadent at the time, possess significant aesthetic and historical value, such as the novels of the Marquis de Sade and *The Golden Lotus* (金瓶梅). How can the works of intelligent machines maintain artistic integrity through value alignment? This also deserves careful consideration.

Therefore, how to reconstruct a collaborative machine poetics amidst the inevitable wave of intelligence remains an open and worthwhile question. This reconstruction requires caution against the illusion of machine omnipotence, recognizing that whatever it produces, no matter how perfect it may appear, is derived from all that is known within the human spirit. Perhaps true creativity and initiative are the most cherished qualities in human creation. We must also be wary of the repeated erosion and manipulation of our thinking by algorithms, recognizing that the real forces behind artificial intelligence still stem from human society. Only then can we advance AI through interdisciplinary collaboration, integrating technology, the humanities, and the social sciences. We also need to break free from the logic of prioritizing technology and efficiency, recognizing that breaking existing rules and discovering the inherent absurdities and biases of reality may be the most valuable aspects of artistic creation and philosophical thinking. Exploring these questions is not a matter of idle concern. Ancient anxieties about intelligent machines resonate within this question. From the story of Talos in the *Iliad* to the legend of Yanshi in *Liezi*, human concerns about losing control of our ingenious creations are essentially concerns about the potential threat to our own unique subjectivity. The stories of intelligent machines out of control in science fiction are a modern myth re-created for this purpose. As George Steiner commented: “Myths are the most subtle and direct language of experience. They reproduce the symbolic truths or moments of crisis in the human condition” (Steiner, 2013, p. 198).

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